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Digital Humanities Workshop Series

Center for Digital Research in the Humanities

Fall 9-17-2014

Digitization Fundamentals: Text, Image, and Sound Notes September 17, 2014

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Barney, Brett, "Digitization Fundamentals: Text, Image, and Sound Notes September 17, 2014" (2014). *Digital Humanities Workshop Series*. 2.

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DIGITIZATION FUNDAMENTALS: TEXT, IMAGE, SOUND

*Brett Barney –Image Capture Presentation Notes
September 17, 2014*

EQUIPMENT & SETTINGS

- Use the best camera you have available to you.
- Make sure the camera is set to record images at its highest resolution and in either "TIFF" or "RAW" format.
- The correct white balance setting will depend on the lighting conditions at the repository, but fluorescent is probably the most common. Set the flash to "always off."
- If possible, mount the camera on a tripod. Even a small "table-top" tripod is preferable to holding the camera in your hands. If the repository won't allow you to use a tripod, brace your arm on the top of the table or anything else solid that's available. The idea is to reduce, as much as possible, the blur caused by movement during the short time the aperture is open.
- Use a remote shutter release if possible. This will further reduce blur. If you aren't looking through the viewfinder as you shoot, cover it so that extra light doesn't enter.
- If you have vibration reduction available on your lens/camera, use it, especially if you can't use a tripod and remote shutter release.
- For most situations, I would recommend setting the exposure mode to "Program" (normally indicated by a "P" on a dial). In Program mode the camera adjusts aperture and shutter speed in combination. But keep an eye on the shutter speed and avoid anything slower than 1/125th of a second, especially if you're not using a tripod.
- Disable any in-camera image processing. The names of these settings vary among camera models. Some Nikons, for example, use the term "Picture Control" for a setting that affects color saturation, sharpening, and contrast. The default setting is "Standard," which should be changed to "Neutral." Some Canons manipulate similar aspects of the image through the "Picture Style" settings.

STAGING

- Good lighting will make it much easier to get clear shots of your subject. Natural sunlight is ideal, but usually that's not available, so you'll need to position yourself so that 1) the manuscript leaf receives a maximum amount of light—of whatever kind is available; 2) that the light is as evenly distributed across the entire surface as you can get it; and 3) that glare is minimized.
- Many repositories have book cradles, "snakes," etc. that help support items in stable positions

while you photograph them. If the staff doesn't offer such things to you, don't be shy about asking.

- Include a gray scale or color target and ruler in each shot. This gives you important reference information for comparison and allows you to process images from various repositories, sessions, etc. to similar standards.
- Take time to adjust the physical relationship between each item and the camera so that 1) the horizontal plane of the item and the horizontal plane of the camera back are as close to parallel as possible; 2) the image fills as much of the viewfinder as it can without exceeding any of the boundaries. (You want to be able to see all of the edges but not much beyond them.)
- Avoid using either extreme of the zoom lens's range, since the middle range tends to produce the least amount of distortion. If you find yourself using either end of the range, try physically repositioning the item or the camera instead.

SHOOTING

- Be sure to focus before each shot. On most cameras, this means depressing the shutter-release button halfway and waiting for a little beep and/or some sort of visual signal, which confirms that the auto-focus feature worked successfully. If the camera has trouble focusing properly, switch to manual focus.
- If you're not sure whether a particular shot will be adequate, shoot another. Don't rely on the relatively small LED screen to determine whether an image will be blurry when viewed at full resolution.
- It's also a good idea to take multiple shots of an item if it is oversize or if different material is visible depending upon how the item is situated.

MANAGING IMAGES

- Take good notes as you go. Record detailed information about the disposition of the items you photograph (e.g., collection, box, and folder names) and about any physical characteristics that may not be apparent from the photograph (e.g., what's on the other side of the leaf, which pages these are, whether something is folded, etc.)
- Download frequently. Besides minimizing the number of files you would lose should your card fail, doing this will also give you a chance to do a quick spot-check for things like focus and to make sure that your record-keeping is in sync with the actual images you've captured.
- Store your files in a secure place, and when you process the images (e.g., crop, rotate, color correct, etc.), always work on copies of the original files.